



# Women and Minority Veterans Quarterly Newsletter

April - June 2008

## A Message From Deputy Secretary Barbara Ward



I am pleased to announce that the Women Veterans Conference has been scheduled for Friday, August 8, 2008. It will be held in Sacramento at the Lions Gate Hotel from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The keynote speaker is Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, RN. Ed.D., Director of the Center for Women Veterans located in Washington, D.C.

The one-day program will include panel discussions, updates on women veterans' issues, legislative proposals, and afternoon workshops. Please note that the conference is free and limited to 200 attendees. Based upon preliminary responses, the conference will fill up quickly.

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## Modesto Soldier Receives Bronze Star For Valor

An Alaska-based soldier who rushed through a blitz of gunfire as she tried to save the lives of two civilian convoy drivers injured in Iraq received the military's fourth-highest combat award this week, according to the Alaska Army National Guard.

Spc. Veronica Alfaro, 23, of Modesto was presented the Bronze Star Medal for Valor in a ceremony in Iraq. Vice President Dick Cheney presented the award to her.

Alfaro, a combat medic and driver with Bravo Company, 297th Support Battalion, was confronted by heavily armed insurgents Jan. 15 when driving a gun truck as an escort to the civilian convoy on the main U.S. supply route between Baghdad and Balad, Iraq.

The ambush came just after midnight, according to the award citation.

Four machine guns lit up the night, with small-arms fire bursting out across the flat landscape from positions concealed behind brush.

Alfaro turned into the fire to protect some of the civilian drivers and give her gunner a shot at the attackers. A barrage of bullets pelted her vehicle in the process. She wasn't hit, but the civilian driver of the vehicle ahead of her was. Alfaro grabbed some medical supplies and sprinted to the position, more than 50 yards away from her own, despite the persisting onslaught. Members of Alfaro's crew reported seeing bullets kicking up dust at her feet

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## Message from Deputy Secretary Ward cont:

I anticipate posting registration information on our website, so stay tuned for further information. We will conclude our conference with a drawing for some really neat surprises!

As most of you know, the week of March 16 – 22<sup>nd</sup> was designated as Women's Military History Week. Governor Schwarzenegger's proclamation is available on the CDVA and Governor's websites ([www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov); [www.gov.ca.gov](http://www.gov.ca.gov)). Locally, the Women's Caucus hosted a special reception honoring military women on March 12<sup>th</sup> in the Rotunda at the Capitol and had numerous displays of women veterans and active duty women who have served, and continue to serve, our nation. Conference attendees will have an opportunity to view these displays during the Women Veterans Conference in August. There were many receptions, workshops and programs held throughout the state honoring military women during the month of March.

On June 20 – 22, the 2008 National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues will be held in Washington, DC at the Westin City Center Hotel. You may register and find out more details about the summit at the following website: [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet) or you may call 202-461-6193. Registration is free and is limited to the first 300 registrants. The summit will provide a great networking opportunity for women veterans, as well as a wealth of information regarding the latest updates on issues that are relevant. This year's summit will include a town hall meeting and a health expo.

Please feel free to call the women veterans line at 916-653-2551 to obtain assistance at anytime. I am very interested in making this newsletter one

that contains information that is useful and valuable to each of you. Therefore, I welcome your suggestions. Please remember that each of you can make a difference by reaching out to help another veteran!

**Barbara Ward**

*Deputy Secretary for Women and Minority Veterans Affairs*



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## Bronze Star Goes To Modesto Soldier, Veronica Alfaro cont:

and tracer rounds whizzing past her head as she ran.

When she reached the wounded driver, she used her body as a shield as she tried to help him, though he later died from his injuries. Moments later, a report of another wounded civilian driver came over the radio, leading Alfaro to hop into a gun truck and rush to the position, where she saved that driver's life.

"Spc. Alfaro's courage under fire is exceptional," Bravo Company commander Capt. Joshua Shrader, of Juneau, said in a written statement. "She helps make this hostile environment a little safer through her actions and willingness to help protect everyone around her."



# Medal of Honor Presented To The Family Of Master Sergeant Woodrow Wilson Keeble

On March 3, 2008, President Bush presented the Medal of Honor to the family of Master Sergeant Woodrow Wilson Keeble in a ceremony held in the East Room of the White House.

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor a President can bestow.



In the President's speech he acknowledged that it took nearly 60 years for Master Sergeant Woodrow Wilson Keeble to be awarded the medal he earned on the battlefield in Korea. His nominating paperwork was lost several times, missing the filing deadline, resulting in the family being told it was too late. Some blamed the bureaucracy for a shameful blunder.

Others suspected racism: Woody was a full-blooded Sioux Indian. Whatever the reason, the first Sioux to ever receive the Medal of Honor died without knowing it was his. A terrible injustice was done to a good man, to his family, and to history.

Woody's story is truly a remarkable one that demonstrates how his acts of heroism saved many American lives and thus earned him a permanent place in his fellow soldier's hearts.

Years later, some of those tough soldiers' eyes would fill with tears as Woody was finally publicly recognized for his brave actions.

In his community, Woody was an everyday hero. Even in poor health, he would mow lawns for seniors in the summers and help cars out of the snow banks in the winters. He once picked up a hitchhiker who was down on his luck and looking for work. Woody wasn't a rich man, but he gave the man \$50. Those who knew Woody can tell countless stories like this -- one of a great soldier who became a Good Samaritan.

To his last days, he was a devoted veteran. He proudly wore his uniform at local events and parades. Sometimes folks who loved him would see that uniform and ask him about his missing medal. They felt he was cheated, yet Woody never complained. See, he believed America was the greatest nation on Earth, even when it made mistakes. And there was never a single day he wasn't proud to have served our country.

The citation may be read at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)



Family members of U.S. Army Master Sgt. Woodrow Wilson Keeble attend the presentation of his Medal of Honor.





## **Los Angeles Non Profit *Military Women In Need* Helps Vulnerable Female Veterans**

West Los Angeles based-non profit *Military Women In Need* (MWIN) provides vital living assistance to female veterans and widows of veterans, aged 55 and above, throughout Southern California.

MWIN offers these women financial aid to help pay for such basic needs as housing, food and medical care. Members of the organization also visit beneficiaries in their homes to offer social support. Additionally, they provide referrals to other community resources available to veterans, such as healthcare and psychological support services.

MWIN's goal for more than 80 years has been to prevent homelessness in this often-vulnerable population. (The majority of MWIN's beneficiaries live on less than \$950 a month, or \$12,000 a year).

An example of MWIN's good work is Cathy's story. Cathy, a Marine Corps veteran, served during the Vietnam War.

Her 3 years of military service encompassed the Vietnam War, during which, while stationed in San Diego, she unloaded cargo that had been exposed to Agent Orange. She subsequently developed serious medical problems, including cancer of the knee, and became confined to a wheelchair.

When she had trouble paying both her rent and exorbitant medical bills, MWIN stepped in to help her find adequate housing, move her belongings, furnish her apartment, establish low-cost phone service and pay the rent. MWIN has enabled Cathy, someone who sacrificed while serving her country, to continue to live independently and with dignity.

MWIN, which currently serves over 400 veterans and family members per year, welcomes your donations. Your contribution will help prevent other military women from falling through society's cracks, and ensure that they can continue to live with safety, security and care.

For more information, to volunteer or to make a donation, please call: 310-441-9635 or go to: [www.militarywomeninneed.org](http://www.militarywomeninneed.org).

### **Governor Announces \$6 Million in Grants to Help California's Veterans Find New Jobs**

Continuing his commitment to California's brave servicemen and women, Governor Schwarzenegger has announced more than \$6 million in grants to help military veterans as they return to the civilian workforce.

The \$6 million in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds will help more than 1,500 newly discharged veterans find jobs. Additionally, the 12 agencies and organizations across California receiving the grants have committed matching funds of almost \$4 million to further expand their job training programs, for a total investment of nearly \$10 million.

Additional information can be found on the Governor's website at:

<http://gov.ca.gov/issue/veterans-military>.

## **News for OEF/OIF Veterans**

### **Student Veterans Form Powerhouse San Diego Veterans News – Feb. 1, 2008**

Student Veterans of America is a newly formed national group of student veterans with representatives from 13 states. Nathaniel Donnelly, is the president of the San Diego State University Student Veteran Organization and they are taking on a new role of addressing issues facing student veterans. Some of the plans of this new and growing group include: placing veteran resource offices or coordinators on college campuses to assist veterans returning to school with their transition as well as receiving benefits and relevant information. You can find out more information about this organization at: [www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org).

### **Wounded Hero Home Program**

Specially adapted homes are being built by Helping a Hero for severely wounded heroes injured in theater during the War on Terror. To date, 3 homes have been built and 4 homes have been awarded with plans for an additional 25 homes to be built in 8 states in the United States. You may find out more information at: [www.helpingahero.org](http://www.helpingahero.org).

### **Sentinels of Freedom – Scholarships**

This organization's mission is to provide life-changing opportunities for men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who have suffered severe injuries and need support of grateful communities to realize their dreams. Sentinels of Freedom offers 4-year "life scholarships" to severely wounded veterans to help them become self sufficient. More information about the scholarships and application process can be located at: [www.sentinelsoffreedom.org](http://www.sentinelsoffreedom.org).

### **The American Legion Post – OEF/OIF Veterans**

The American Legion Post 911 is building a post that is chartered and dedicated to meeting the needs of returning veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Its founders hope to fill the void that America's service members are currently falling into. Post 911 will continue to offer long established Legion sponsored programs and activities while adding new ones that will appeal to the interests of the new generation of veterans. The American Legion Post 911 will be holding their first annual "California American Heroes" Awards Ceremony at the War Memorial Veterans Building in San Francisco on Friday, May 9, 2008 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. For more information visit the Legion's website at [www.legionpost911.org](http://www.legionpost911.org) or contact the event organizer, American Legion Post 911 Commander Captain Michael Gerold at [mgerold@legionpost911.org](mailto:mgerold@legionpost911.org).

### **Wounded Warrior Sponsors Free Event for Women Service Members**

The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is sponsoring a female event for service members that have been diagnosed with severe cases of PTSD/MST. The Miami trip expenses are paid for by WWP and takes place from April 13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>. The activities will include sailing, kayaking, snorkeling, and team building exercises. Vet Center Counselors will be attending this event. Please contact Todd Gould at 619-931-9375 or via email at: [tgould@WoundedWarriorProject.org](mailto:tgould@WoundedWarriorProject.org).

## Aid and Attendance An Underused Benefit

Many veterans are unaware of a special monthly pension benefit administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) called Aid and Attendance that is available to wartime veterans and surviving spouses. It provides a monthly pension benefit for wartime veterans and surviving spouses, who have in-home care, live in nursing homes or in assisted living facilities.

Many elderly veterans and surviving spouses whose income is above the congressionally mandated legal limit for a USDVA pension may still be eligible for the benefit if they have large medical expenses, including nursing home expenses.

To qualify, claimants must be incapable of self-care and in need of regular personal assistance. For more information, call the USDVA at 1-800-827-1000.

## IMPORTANT NEWS FOR VETERANS

### BENEFIT CHANGES

As of February 1st, the beneficiary travel mileage rate was increased from 11cents/mile to 28.5 cents per mile. This increase was the result of the 2008 Appropriations Act, which provided funding to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

On January 28, 2008, Public Law 110-181, titled the "National Defense Authorization Act of 2008", was signed into law. Section 1707 amended Title 38, extending the period of eligibility for health care for veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, commonly referred to as Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans. Currently, enrolled veterans and new enrollees who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003, are eligible for the enhanced benefits, for 5 years post discharge.

Veterans discharged from active duty before January 28, 2003, who apply for enrollment on or after January 28, 2008, are eligible for the enhanced benefit until January 27, 2011. Additional information can be obtained by calling the Health Benefit Service Center at 877-222-8387 or by contacting the nearest USDVA Medical Center. This act also extended the timeframe for veterans to make application for the one-time dental benefit from 90 days to 180 days post discharge. The 2008 Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents is available at [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov). Combat Veteran Benefits Eligibility fact sheets can be obtained at: <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/CombatVet/CombatVet.pdf>.



**Veterans: You may be eligible for a 30-Year Home Loan at 5.45%**

**Contact CalVet at 866-653-2510 or visit**

**[www.calvet.ca.gov/calvetloans](http://www.calvet.ca.gov/calvetloans) for more information.**

# Immunizations Available to Women Veterans Through the USDVA to Reduce the Risk of Cervical Cancer and Genital Warts.

By Leslie E. Satz,  
*USDVA San Diego Medical Health Center*

There are about 40 types or strains of human papillomavirus (HPV). The development of cervical cancer and genital warts is associated with infection from certain strains of HPV.

People are exposed to HPV viruses through sexual contact. Sexually active men and women have a 50% lifetime risk of HPV infection. Most infections resolve without any treatment, often without the person ever knowing they were infected. However, some high-risk strains of HPV may cause genital warts. Other high-risk strains may cause abnormal cell changes in the cervix, which can develop into cervical cancer.

There are several ways to reduce or prevent HPV infection. These include sexual abstinence, the use of condoms, sexually monogamous relationships, and now, vaccination against several strains most commonly associated with the development of cervical cancer and genital warts.

The immunization currently used in the United States is called Gardasil. It has been approved for use in females between the ages of 9 years and 26 years. It requires three shots. The first two are given two months apart. The third is given five months after the second.

It is not recommended for pregnant women or women who may become pregnant during the six month time period of getting the shots and for one month after the last shot. It can, and should, be given to women who have had abnormal Pap tests, because there are still other strains of HPV that could cause infections.

Women should not stop getting regular Pap tests, even after they have been immunized, because there

are other, less common strains, of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and genital warts.

These immunizations are available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) and Veterans Administration, as well as private medical offices and public clinics. The full cost of each shot is rather high. It cost this writer \$281 to pay for one office visit and one shot for her uninsured daughter, which means the series of three shots will come close to \$840. Depending on your eligibility, your immunizations through the USDVA may cost \$15 an office visit or may even be free.

If you are eligible to receive health care through the USDVA and you are under 27 years old and female, this is a service you may want to take advantage of. If you are not already enrolled at the USDVA, contact your local USDVA business office or the Women Veterans Program Manager at your local USDVA.

**Women and Minority Veterans Affairs**  
**CA Department of Veterans Affairs**  
1227 O Street, Room 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Phone:** (916) 653-2551

**Fax:** (916) 651-6262

**E-mail:** [Barbara.Ward@cdva.ca.gov](mailto:Barbara.Ward@cdva.ca.gov)

**Barbara Ward**

Deputy Secretary for Women and Minority Veterans Affairs

**JP Tremblay**

Deputy Secretary for External Affairs

**Jerry Jones**

Chief, Legislation and Public Affairs

**Jaime A. Arteaga**

Information Officer II

Editor

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[womenminorityveterans-subscribe@dva.ca.gov](mailto:womenminorityveterans-subscribe@dva.ca.gov)

# Women's Trauma Recovery Program

**By Darrah Westrup, M.D.**

*USDVA Palo Alto Medical Health Center*

The Women's Trauma Recovery Program (WTRP) was established in 1992 and is the longest running residential treatment program for women veterans with military-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Based in Menlo Park California, the WTRP is part of the USDVA Palo Alto Healthcare System and is closely affiliated with the Education Division of the National Center for PTSD, also based in Menlo Park. The WTRP is a national program; approximately 80% of the women served come from out-of-state and report PTSD from a wide range of traumatic experiences, including war zone trauma and military sexual trauma (MST).

The program is divided into two program tracks. The "Skills Track" is a 60-day program geared towards helping women improve skills of daily living, including interpersonal and communication skills, skills to better cope with stress and intense emotions such as anxiety, shame, or anger, and to shift painful, problematic ways of thinking. The "Trauma Track" also incorporates these skills, but includes intensive exposure-based treatment for PTSD. A central aim of treatment is to help women who have experienced trauma reclaim their lives and sense of worth. Women do not self-refer to the program. Applications must be completed by a mental health provider to help ensure both that the WTRP is a treatment match at this stage of the applicant's recovery, and that women who enter the WTRP are appropriately supported both prior to, and following their participation in the program.

We believe in providing evidence-based treatments for PTSD and have established a reputation for delivering innovative, cutting-edge treatment to women. For example, we have been providing Seeking Safety training since 2000, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy since 2001, and Cognitive Processing Therapy since 2004 – all of which represented the first time (along with the Men's Trauma Recovery Program in Menlo Park) that these highly regarded treatments were offered in a residential PTSD treatment setting. We have learned much from these experiences and continue to explore ways to further enhance and refine the care provided at the WTRP.

For program information, please visit our website at [www.womenvetsptsd.va.gov](http://www.womenvetsptsd.va.gov). You may also contact our Admissions Coordinator, Kristen Marchak, at [Kristen.Marchak2@va.gov](mailto:Kristen.Marchak2@va.gov) or (650) 493-5000 ext. 24692.

## Bills Sponsored By The California Department Of Veterans Affairs

**SB 1675**

**COX**

**Veterans Revenue Debenture Act of 1970**

The California Department of Veterans Affairs issues State of California Veterans Revenue Bonds, as authorized by the Legislature, to provide funds to make CalVet Home Loans. This bill would amend Military and Veterans Code to provide specific authority for the Veterans' Debenture Finance Committee to delegate bond structuring authority to the Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs and for CDVA to issue variable rate bonds to provide funds for its CalVet Home Loan Program.

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## CDVA Sponsored Legislation cont:

### **SB 1572      WYLAND      Veterans Bond Act of 2008**

SB 1572 will place the Veterans Bond Act of 2008 on the November 2008 ballot. The Act would authorize the issuance of \$900 million in Veterans General Obligation Bonds. Since 1921, the state has regularly sought and received voter approval to issue Veterans General Obligation Bonds, the proceeds of which are used to finance the CalVet home loan program. Since 1943, voters have approved 26 Veterans' Bond Acts, the most recent being in 2000 (Proposition 32).

### **SB 1455      COGDILL      Gold Star Family License Plates**

SB 1455 will amend the Vehicle Code to authorize special recognition license plates for Gold Star Families. The new plates would be issued to any person who has had an immediate family member killed while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Currently, there are five Special Recognition License Plates issued by the DMV to recognize recipients of the Purple Heart, Legion of Valor and Medal of Honor, Pearl Harbor Survivors and Former Prisoners of War. What these license plates have in common, and sets them apart from special interest license plates, such as the Arts Council and Yosemite Foundation license plates, is that those eligible for them have made significant sacrifices for their state and nation. A significant sacrifice has also been made by the families of those members of the U.S. Armed Forces killed while serving their country, yet there is no license plate to give special recognition to their sacrifice.

### **AB 3065      Assembly VA Committee      Public Employment; Veterans**

AB 3065 will allow veterans who have retired from active military service, were honorably discharged from service with a service-connected disability or were honorably discharged from active duty, access to state of California promotional exams consistent with their qualifications and experience. Currently veterans entering state service are eligible to take only open non-promotional exams.

## **Oakland Veterans Affairs Regional Office Benefits Outreach Contacts**

The Oakland VA Regional Office has a number of individuals designated to meet the needs of veterans. Some of the special outreach efforts are directed toward VA benefits for women veterans, for case managing and expediting veterans who have OEF/OIF claims, homeless veterans, and elderly and minority veterans. The following individuals are contact points for these important programs.

#### **Maureen O'Neill**

Women's Veterans Coordinator

**(510) 637-6398**

Maureen.Oneill@va.gov

#### **Lee Delony**

OEF/OIF Case Manager

**(510) 637-6327**

Lee.Delony@va.gov

#### **Linden Feil**

OIF/OEF Outreach Coordinator

**(916) 364-6788**

Linden.Feil@va.gov

#### **Christina Arrasmith**

Homeless Veteran Outreach Coordinator

**(916) 634-6547**

Christina.Arrasmith@va.gov

#### **Leland Low**

Elderly and Minority Veteran Outreach Coordinator

**(510) 637-6147**

Leland.Low@va.gov

# **“Color Guard...Attention...Present Colors!”**

## **USDVA Women Veterans’ Color Guard**

**By Teri Mason**

In precise synchronization, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Women Veterans’ Color Guard steps off to the familiar cadence called by recently returning Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran Daphne Cuyler.

Since May 2000, the Color Guard has been touring the Fresno Valley presenting colors. The Color Guard team was formed during Diversity Week at the USDVA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS) in Fresno, at the insistence of Pete Molina, Native American Program Manager. He coordinated the week-long opening ceremonies with a different color guard each day to represent the diversity of staff and valley veterans.

Six years later, the USDVA Women Veterans’ Color Guard is going strong with nine full-time veterans representing the five branches of the military and the USDVA, American, POW and California flags. The composition of the team is a fitting representation of the diversity at the USDVA, the U.S. military, and valley residents.



Requirements of being on the team include: honorable discharge from the military, being a full-time employee at VACCHCS, and a desire to volunteer time and a commitment to being sharp, meticulous, and accurate in formation.

The color guard is called on several times each month to perform at events such as the Fresno Mayor’s State of the City Address, Veterans Appreciation Day in Madera, the National Women’s Insurance Conference, the Annual Ex-POW ceremony, The American Legion National Convention, the Elk’s Club National Convention, and the Vietnam Veteran’s Moving Wall ceremony.

For more information contact Captain Kathy Baca at 559-349-8531 or via email at [Kathy.Baca@va.gov](mailto:Kathy.Baca@va.gov).

## Upcoming Events in 2008

### APRIL

- April 5**      **Women Veterans of America**, Sonora Chapter, at 1:00 p.m. Contact: Commander Judy Carson-Carroll, 209-588-2715
- April 8**      **OEF/OIF Women's Support Group**, Women's Comprehensive Health Center, West Los Angeles USDVA, Contact: Stacy Bernstein-Haas, M.D. 310-268-4316
- April 19**      **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Salute to Veterans Parade**, Noon, Downtown Riverside, Contact: Elaine Garza 951-955-3010
- April 26**      **Santa Barbara Commission for Women Luncheon** honoring OEF/OIF women veterans. Contact Mary Ellen Brooks at 805-733-3462
- April 27**      **Alameda County Women Veterans Luncheon**, Veterans Building. Contact: Pat Ryan, 510-351-1819

### MAY

- May 10**      **Welcome Home 2008 – Honoring Bay Area OEF/OIF Veterans**, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Chase Park – Moffett Field, Contact: 1-888-482-HERO
- May 26**      **Memorial Day** – Statewide events to be posted on the CA Department of Veterans Affairs website at [www.cdva.ca.gov](http://www.cdva.ca.gov).

### JUNE

- June 20–22**      **4<sup>th</sup> National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues**, Washington, D.C. Register at: <http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/page.cfm?pg=70>

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